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MODERN INFIDELITY CONSIDERED

With respect to its

INFLUENCE ON SOCIETY:

IN

A SERMON,

PREACHED

AT

THE BAPTIST MEETING,

Cambridge.

By ROBERT HALL, A.M.

Professing themselves to be wise they became fools. ST. PAUL.

Sunt qui in fortunæ jam casibus, omnia ponant,
Et nullo credant mundum rectore moveri,
Natura volvente vices et lucis, et anni;
Atque ideo intrepidi quæcunque altaria tangunt. JUV.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

PREFACE.

THE Author knows not whether it be necessary to apologize for the extraordinary length of this Sermon, which so much exceeds the usual limits of public discourses; for it is only for the Reader to conceive, (by a fiction of the imagination, if he pleases so to consider it,) that the patience of his Audience indulged him with their attention during its delivery. The fact is, not being in the habit of writing his sermons, this discourse was not committed to paper till after it was delivered; so that the phraseology may probably vary, and the bulk be somewhat extended; but the substance is certainly retained.

He must crave the indulgence of the Religious Public for having blended so little *theology* with it. He is fully aware, the chief attention of a Christian Minister should be occupied in explaining the doctrines, and enforcing

the duties, of genuine Christianity; nor is he chargeable, he hopes, in the exercise of his public functions, with any remarkable deviation from that rule of conduct; yet is he equally convinced, excursions into other topics are sometimes both lawful and necessary. The versatility of error demands a correspondent variety in the methods of defending truth: and from whom have the public more right to expect its defence, in opposition to the encroachments of error and Infidelity, than from those who profess to devote their studies and lives to the advancement of virtue and Religion? Accordingly, a multitude of publications on these subjects equally powerful in argument, and impressive in manner, have issued from divines of different persuasions, which must be allowed to have done the utmost honour to the clerical profession. The most luminous statements of the evidences of Christianity, on historical grounds, have been made; the petulant cavils of Infidels satisfactorily refuted; their ignorance, if not to say put to shame, at least amply exposed;

so that Revelation, as far as truth and reason can prevail, is on all sides triumphant.

There remains, however, one point of view in which the respective systems may be regarded, which, though hitherto little considered, is forced upon our attention by the present conduct of our adversaries; that is, their *Influence on Society.* The controversy appears to have taken a new turn. The advocates of Infidelity, baffled in the field of argument, though unwilling to relinquish the contest, have changed their mode of attack, and seem less disposed to impugn the authority than to supersede the use of Revealed Religion, by giving such representations of man and of society as are calculated to make its sanctions appear unreasonable and unnecessary. Their aim is not so much to discredit the pretensions of any particular Religion, as to set aside the principles common to all.

To obliterate the sense of Deity, of moral sanctions, and a future world, and by these means to prepare the way for the total sub-

version of every institution, both social and religious, which men have been hitherto accustomed to revere, is evidently the principal object of modern Sceptics; the first Sophists who have avowed an attempt to govern the world without inculcating the persuasion of a superior power.---It might well excite our surprise, to behold an effort to shake off the yoke of Religion, which was totally unknown during the prevalence of gross superstition, reserved for a period of the world distinguished from every other by the possession of a Revelation more pure, perfect and better authenticated, than the enlightened sages of antiquity ever ventured to anticipate, were we not fully persuaded the immaculate holiness of this Revelation renders it disgusting to men who are determined at all events to retain their vices. Our Saviour furnishes the solution; *When men's deeds are evil*, it is not to be wondered at that *they love darkness rather than light.*

While all the Religions, the Jewish excepted, which prevailed in the world before Christi-

Christianity, partly the contrivance of human policy, partly the offspring of ignorant fear, mixed with the mutilated remains of traditionary revelation, were favorable to the indulgence of some vices, and but feebly restrained the practice of others; betwixt vice of every sort and in every degree, and the Religion of Jesus, there subsist an irreconcileable enmity, and an eternal discord. The dominion of Christianity being, in the very essence of it, the dominion of virtue, we need look no farther for the sources of hostility in any who oppose it, than in their attachment to vice and disorder.

This view of the controversy, if it be just, demonstrates its supreme importance, and furnishes the strongest plea with every one with whom it is not a matter of indifference whether vice or virtue, delusion or truth, govern the world, to exert his talents in whatever proportion they are possesed, in *contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.* In such a crisis, is it not best for Christians of all denominations, that they may

may better concentrate their forces against the common adversary, to suspend for the present their internal disputes, imitating the policy of wiſe ſtates, who have never failed to consider the invasion of an enemy as the signal for terminating the contests of party? Internal peace is the beſt fruit of external danger. The momentous contest at issue betwixt the Christian Church and Infidels, may instruct us how trivial, for the most part, are the controversies of its members with each other, and that the different ceremonies, opinions and practices, by which they are distinguished, correspond to the variety of feature and complexion, discernible in the offspring of the same Parents, among whom there subsists the greatest family likeness. May it please God so to dispose the minds of Christians of every visible church and community, *that Ephraim no longer vexing Judah, nor Judah Ephraim*, the only rivalry felt in future may be, who shall most advance the interests of our common Christianity,

and

and the only provocation sustained, *that of provoking each other to love and good works!* When at the distance of more than half a century Christianity was assaulted, bya *Woolston*, a *Tindal*, and a *Morgan*, it was ably supported both by clergymen of the Established Church, and writers among Protestant Dissenters; the labours of a *Clarke* and a *Butler*, were associated with those of a *Doddridge*, a *Leland*, and a *Lardner*, with such equal reputation and success, as to make it evident that the intrinsic excellence of Religion needs not the aid of external appendages; but that, with or without a dowry, her charms are of equal force to fix and engage the heart.

The writer of this discourse will feel himself happy, should his example stimulate any of his brethren, of superior abilities, to contribute their exertions in so good a cause. His apology for not entering more at large, into the proofs of the being of God*, and the

* See an excellent Sermon on Atheism, by the Rev. Mr. *Eſtlin*, of *Briſtol*, at whose Meeting the substance of this discourse

the evidences of Christianity †, is, that these subjects have been already handled with great ability by various writers, and that he wished rather to confine himself to one view of the subject, the total incompatibility of Sceptical principles with the existence of Society. Should his life be spared, he may probably, at some future time, enter into a fuller and more particular examination of the Infidel Philosophy, both with respect to its speculative principles, and its practical effects; its influence on society and on individuals. In the mean time, he humbly consecrates this discourse to the honour of that Saviour, who, when the means of a more liberal offering are wanting, commends the widow's mite.

course was first preached. In the sermon referred to, the argument for the existence of a Deity, is stated with the utmost clearness and precision, and the sophistry of *Dupuis*, a French Infidel, refuted in a very satisfactory manner.

† It is almost superfluous to name a work so universally known as Dr. *Paley's View of the Evidences of Christianity*, which is, probably, without exception, the most clear and satisfactory statement of the Historical proofs of the Christian Religion, ever exhibited in any age or country.

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SERMON

ON

EPHESIANS II. 12.

Without God in the World.

AS the Chriſtian miniſtry is eſtabliſhed for the inſtruction of men throughout every age, in truth and holineſs, it muſt adapt itſelf to the ever ſhifting ſcenes of the moral world, and ſtand ready to repel the attacks of impiety and error, under whatever form they may appear. The Church and the World form two ſocieties ſo diſtinct, and governed by ſuch oppoſite principles and maxims, that, as well from this contrariety as from the expreſs warnings of Scripture, true Chriſtians muſt look for a ſtate of warfare, with this conſoling aſſurance, that the Church, like the burning buſh beheld by Moſes in the land of Midian, may be encompaſſed with flames, but will never be conſumed.

When ſhe was delivered from the perſecuting power of Rome, ſhe only experienced a change of

trials. The oppreſſion of external violence was followed by the more dangerous and inſidious attacks of internal enemies. The freedom of enquiry claimed and aſſerted at the reformation, degeneted, in the hands of men who profeſſed the principles without poſſeſſing the ſpirit of the reformers, into a fondneſs for ſpeculative refinements, and, conſequently, into a ſource of diſpute, faction and hereſy. While proteſtants attended more to the points on which they differed, than to thoſe in which they agreed, while more zeal was employed in ſettling ceremonies and defending ſubtleties, than in enforcing plain revealed truths, the lovely fruits of peace and charity periſhed under the ſtorms of controverſy.

In this disjointed, and diſordered ſtate of the Chriſtian Church, they who never looked into the interior of Chriſtianity were apt to ſuſpect, that to a ſubject ſo fruitful in particular diſputes, muſt attach a general uncertainty, and that a religion founded on revelation, could never have occaſioned ſuch diſcordancy of principle and practice amongſt its diſciples. Thus Infidelity is the join to ffspring of an irreligious temper and unholy ſpeculation, employed, not in examining the Evidences of Chriſtianity

tianity, but in detecting the vices and imperfections of profeſſing chriſtians.

Infidelity has paſſed through various ſtages, each diſtinguiſhed by higher gradations of impiety; for, when men arrogantly abandon their guide, and wilfully ſhut their eyes on the light of heaven, it is wiſely ordained that their errors ſhall multiply at every ſtep, until their extravagance confutes itſelf, and the miſchief of their principles works its own antidote. That ſuch has been the progreſs of Deiſm will be obvious from a ſlight ſurvey of its hiſtory:

Lord Herbert, the firſt and pureſt of our Engliſh Free-thinkers, who flouriſhed in the beginning of the reign of Charles the Firſt, did not ſo much impugn the doctrine or the morality of the ſcriptures, as ſuperſede their neceſſity, by endeavouring to ſhew, that the great principles of the unity of God, a moral government, and a future world, are taught with ſufficient clearneſs by the light of nature. *Bolingbroke*, and others of his ſucceſſors, advanced much farther, and attempted to invalidate the proofs of the moral character of the Deity, and conſequently all expectations of rewards and puniſhments, leaving the Supreme Being no other

perfections than thoſe which belong to a firſt cauſe or almighty contriver. After him, at a conſiderable diſtance, followed *Hume*, the moſt ſubtle, if not the moſt philoſophical of the Deiſts, who, by perplexing the relations of cauſe and effect, boldly aimed to introduce an univerſal ſcepticiſm, and to pour a more than Egyptian darkneſs into the whole region of morals. Since his time, ſceptical writers have ſprung up in abundance, and Infidelity has allured multitudes to its ſtandard; the young and ſuperficial by its dextrous ſophiſtry, the vain by the literary fame of its champions, and the profligate by the licentiouſneſs of its principles. Atheiſm, the moſt undiſguiſed, has, at length, begun to make its appearance.

Animated by numbers and emboldened by ſucceſs, the Infidels of the preſent day have given a new direction to their efforts, and impreſſed a new character on the ever growing maſs of their impious ſpeculations.

By uniting more cloſely with each other, by giving a ſprinkling of irreligion to all their literary productions, they aim to engroſs the formation of the public mind, and amidſt the warmeſt profeſſions of attachment to virtue, to effect an entire diſruption

diſruption of morality from religion. Pretending to be the teachers of virtue and the guides of life, they propoſe to revolutionize the morals of mankind, to regenerate the world by a proceſs entirely new, and to rear the temple of virtue, not merely without the aid of religion, but on the renunciaciation of its principles and the deriſion of its ſanctions. Their party has derived a great acceſſion of numbers and ſtrength, from events the moſt momentous and aſtoniſhing in the political world, which have divided the ſentiments of Europe betwixt hope and terror, and, however they may iſſue, have, for the preſent, ſwelled the ranks of infidelity. So rapidly indeed has it advanced ſince this criſis, that a great majority on the continent, and a conſiderable proportion in England of thoſe who purſue literature as a profeſſion, may juſtly be conſidered as the open or diſguiſed abettors of Atheiſm.

With reſpect to the ſceptical and religious ſyſtems, the inquiry at preſent is not ſo much which is the trueſt in ſpeculation, as which is the moſt uſeful in practice; or, in other words, whether morality will be beſt promoted, by conſidering it as part of a great and comprehenſive law, emana-

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ting from the will of a ſupreme, omnipotent legiſlator; or as a mere expedient adapted to our preſent ſituation, enforced by no other motives than thoſe which ariſe from the proſpects and intereſts of the preſent ſtate. The *abſurdity* of Atheiſm having been demonſtrated ſo often and ſo clearly by many eminent men, that this part of the ſubject is exhauſted, I ſhould haſten immediately to what I have more particularly in view, were I not apprehenſive a diſcourſe of this kind may be expected to contain ſome ſtatement of the argument in proof of a Deity, which, therefore, I ſhall preſent in as few and plain words as poſſible.

When we examine a watch, or any other piece of machinery, we inſtantly perceive marks of deſign. The arrangement of its ſeveral parts and the adaptation of its movements to one reſult, ſhew it to be a contrivance; nor do we ever imagine the faculty of contriving to be in the watch itſelf, but in a ſeparate agent. If we turn from art to nature, we behold a vaſt magazine of contrivances, we ſee innumerable objects replete with the moſt exquiſite deſign. The human eye, for example, is formed, with admirable ſkill for the purpoſe of ſight; the ear for the function of hearing. As in the productions

tions of art, we never think of aſcribing the power of contrivance to the machine itſelf, ſo we are certain the ſkill diſplayed in the human ſtructure is not a property of man, ſince he is very imperfectly acquainted with his own formation. If there be an inſeparable relation betwixt the ideas of a contrivance and a contriver, and it be evident in regard to the human ſtructure the deſigning agent is not man himſelf, there muſt undeniably be ſome ſeparate inviſible Being who is his former. This great Being we mean to indicate by the appellation of Deity.—

This reaſoning admits but of one reply. Why, it will be ſaid, may we not ſuppoſe the world has always continued as it is; that is, that there has been a conſtant ſucceſſion of finite beings, appearing and diſappearing on the earth from all eternity? I anſwer, whatever is ſuppoſed to have occaſioned this conſtant ſucceſſion, excluſive of an intelligent cauſe, will never account for the undeniable marks of deſign, viſible in all finite Beings; nor is the abſurdity of ſuppoſing a contrivance without a contriver diminiſhed by this imaginary ſucceſſion, but rather increaſed by being repeated at every ſtep of the ſeries.

Beſides,

Beſides, an eternal ſucceſſion of finite beings involves in it a contradiction, and is, therefore, plainly impoſſible. As the ſuppoſition is made to get quit of the idea of any one being having exiſted from eternity, each of the beings in the ſucceſſion muſt have begun in time; but the ſucceſſion itſelf is eternal. We have then a ſucceſſion of beings infinitely earlier than any being in the ſucceſſion; or, in other words, a ſeries of beings running on *ad infinitum*, before it reached any particular being; which is abſurd.

From theſe conſiderations, it is manifeſt there muſt be ſome Eternal Being, or nothing could have begun to be; and ſince the beings which we behold, bear in their whole ſtructure evident marks of wiſdom and deſign, it is equally certain that he who formed them is a wiſe and intelligent agent.

To prove the unity of the great Being, in oppoſition to a plurality of Gods, it is not neceſſary to have recourſe to metaphyſical abſtractions: it is ſufficient to obſerve, that the notion of more than one author of nature is inconſiſtent with that harmony of deſign which pervades her works, that it ſolves no appearances, is ſupported by no evidence, and ſerves no purpoſe but to embarraſs and perplex our conceptions.

Such are the proofs of the exiſtence of that great and glorious Being whom we denominate God; and it is not preſumption to ſay, it is impoſſible to find another truth in the whole compaſs of morals, which, according to the juſteſt laws of reaſoning, admits of ſuch ſtrict and rigorous demonſtration.

But I proceed to the more immediate object of this diſcourſe, which, as has been already intimated, is not ſo much to evince the falſehood of Scepticiſm as a theory, as to diſplay its miſchievous effects, contraſted with thoſe which reſult from the belief of a Deity and a future ſtate. The ſubject viewed in this light, may be conſidered under two aſpects; the influence of the two ſyſtems on the principles of morals, and on the formation of the character; the firſt may be ſtiled their direct, the latter their equally important, but indirect, conſequence and tendency.

I. The ſceptical or irreligious ſyſtem ſubverts the whole foundation of morals. It may be aſſumed as a maxim, that no perſon can be required to act contrary to his greateſt good, his higheſt intereſt comprehenſively viewed in relation to the whole duration of his being. It is often our duty to

forego our own intereſt *partially*; to ſacrifice a ſmaller pleaſure for the ſake of a greater; to incur a preſent evil in purſuit of a diſtant good of more conſequence: in a word, to arbitrate, amongſt interfering claims of inclination, is the moral arithmetic of human life. But to riſque the happineſs of the whole duration of our being in any caſe whatever, admitting it to be poſſible, would be fooliſh, becauſe the ſacrifice muſt, by the nature of it, be ſo great as to preclude the poſſibility of compenſation.

As the preſent world, upon ſceptical principles, is the only place of recompence, whenever the practice of virtue fails to promiſe the greateſt ſum of preſent good, caſes which often occur, every motive to virtuous conduct is ſuperſeded, a deviation from rectitude becomes the part of wiſdom; and ſhould the path of virtue, in addition to this, be obſtructed by diſgrace, torment, or death, to perſevere would be madneſs and folly, and a violation of the firſt and moſt eſſential law of nature. Virtue on theſe principles, being, in numberleſs inſtances, at war with ſelf-preſervation, never can or ought to become a fixed habit of the mind, but a light ſummer dreſs, ornamental perhaps, but to be worn or laid aſide as convenience may dictate.

The ſyſtem of Infidelity is ſo far from being capable of arming virtue for great and trying occaſions, that it leaves it unſupported in the moſt ordinary occurrences. In vain will its advocates appeal to a moral ſenſe, to benevolence and ſympathy; in vain will they expatiate on the tranquillity and pleaſure attendant on a virtuous courſe; for it is undeniable that theſe impulſes may be overcome, and though you may remind the offender, that in diſregarding them he has violated his nature, and that a conduct conſiſtent with them is productive of much internal ſatisfaction; yet, if he reply that his taſte is of a different ſort, that there are other gratifications which he values more, and that every man muſt chooſe his own pleaſures, the argument is at an end.

Rewards and puniſhments awarded by omnipotent power, afford a palpable and preſſing motive, which can never be neglected without renouncing the character of a rational creature; but taſtes and reliſhes are not to be preſcribed.

A motive in which the reaſon of man ſhall acquieſce, enforcing the practice of virtue, at all times and ſeaſons, enters into the very eſſence of moral obligation; modern infidelity ſupplies no ſuch mo-

tive; it is, therefore, eſſentially and infallibly a ſyſtem of enervation, turpitude and vice.

This chaſm in the conſtruction of morals, can only be ſupplied by the firm belief of a rewarding and avenging Deity, who binds duty and happineſs, though they may ſeem diſtant, in an indiſſoluble chain, without which whatever uſurps the name of virtue, is not a principle, but a feeling, not a determinate rule, but a fluctuating expedient, varying with the taſtes of individuals, and changing with the ſcenes of life.

Nor is this the only way in which Infidelity ſubverts the foundation of morals. All reaſoning on morals, pre-ſuppoſes a diſtinction betwixt inclinations and duties, affections and rules: the former prompt, the latter preſcribe; the former ſupply motives to action, the latter regulate and control it. Hence, it is evident, if virtue has any juſt claim to authority, it muſt be under the latter of theſe notions, that is, under the character of a law. It is under this notion, *in fact*, that its dominion has ever been acknowledged to be paramount and ſupreme.

But without the intervention of a ſuperior will, it is impoſſible there ſhould be any moral laws, except

cept in the lax, metaphorical ſenſe, in which we ſpeak of the laws of matter and motion: men on theſe principles, are eſſentially equal, and morality is only a ſtipulation or ſilent compact, into which every individual is ſuppoſed to enter, as far as ſuits his convenience, and for the breach of which he is accountable to nothing but his own mind. His own mind is his law, his tribunal, and his judge.

Two conſequences, the moſt diſaſtrous to ſociety, will inevitably follow the general prevalence of this ſyſtem: the frequent perpetration of great crimes, and the total abſence of all great virtues.

1. In thoſe conjunctures which tempt avarice or inflame ambition, when a crime flatters with the proſpect of impunity, and the certainty of immenſe advantage, what is to reſtrain an Atheiſt from its commiſſion? To ſay that remorſe will deter him, is abſurd; for remorſe, as diſtinguiſhed from pity, is the ſole offspring of religious belief, the extinction of which is the great purpoſe of the Infidel philoſophy.

The dread of puniſhment or infamy from his fellow creatures, will be an equally ineffectual barrier, becauſe crimes are only committed under ſuch circumſtances as ſuggeſt the hope of concealment; not

not to ſay that crimes themſelves will ſoon loſe their infamy and their horror, under the influence of that ſyſtem which deſtroys the ſanctity of virtue, and converts it into a low calculation of worldly intereſt. Here the ſenſe of an ever-preſent Ruler and of an avenging Judge, is of the moſt awful and indiſpenſible neceſſity, as it is that alone which impreſſes on all crimes the character of folly, ſhews that duty and intereſt in every inſtance coincide, and that the moſt proſperous career of vice, the moſt brilliant ſucceſſes of criminality, are but an *accumulation of wrath againſt the day of wrath.*

As the frequent perpetration of great crimes is an inevitable conſequence of the diffuſion of ſceptical principles, ſo to underſtand this conſequence in its full extent, we muſt look beyond their immediate effects, and conſider the diſruption of ſocial ties, the deſtruction of confidence, the terror, ſuſpicion and hatred, which muſt prevail in that ſtate of ſociety in which barbarous deeds are familiar. The tranquillity which pervades a well-ordered community, and the mutual good offices which bind its members together, is founded on an implied confidence in the indiſpoſition to annoy, in the juſtice, humanity and moderation of thoſe among

among whom we dwell; ſo that the worſt conſequence of crimes is, that they impair the ſtock of public charity and general tenderneſs. The dread and hatred of our ſpecies would infallibly be grafted on a conviction that we were expoſed, every moment to the ſurges of an unbridled ferocity, and that nothing but the power of the magiſtrate preſerved us from the daggers of aſſaſſins. In ſuch a ſtate, laws deriving no ſupport from public manners, are unequal to the taſk of curbing the fury of the paſſions, which from being concentrated into ſelfiſhneſs, fear and revenge, acquire new force; terror and ſuſpicion beget cruelty, and inflict injuries by way of prevention; pity is extinguiſhed in the ſtronger impulſe of ſelf-preſervation; the tender and generous affections are cruſhed, and nothing is ſeen but the retaliation of wrongs, the fierce and unmitigated ſtruggle for ſuperiority. This is but a faint ſketch of the incalculable calamities and horrors we muſt expect, ſhould we be ſo unfortunate as ever to witneſs the triumph of modern Infidelity.

2. This ſyſtem is a ſoil as barren of great and ſublime virtues as it is prolific in crimes. By great and ſublime virtues are meant, thoſe which are called

called into action on great and trying occaſions, which demand the ſacrifice of the deareſt intereſts and proſpects of human life, and ſometimes of life itſelf; the virtues, in a word, which by their rarity and ſplendour draw admiration, and have rendered illuſtrious the character of patriots, martyrs, and confeſſors. It requires but little reflection to perceive, that whatever veils a future world, and contracts the limits of exiſtence within the preſent life, muſt tend, in a proportionable degree, to diminiſh the grandeur and narrow the ſphere of human agency.

As well might you expect exalted ſentiments of juſtice from a profeſſed gameſter, as look for noble principles in the man whoſe hopes and fears are all ſuſpended on the preſent moment, and who ſtakes the whole happineſs of his being on the events of this vain and fleeting life. If he is ever impelled to the performance of any great atchievements in a good cauſe, it muſt be ſolely by the hope of fame; a motive which, beſides that it makes virtue the ſervant of opinion, uſually grows weaker at the approach of death, and which, however it may ſurmount the love of exiſtence, in the heat of battle, or in the moment of public obſervation, can ſeldom

be

be expected to operate with much force on the retired duties of a private ſtation.

In affirming that Infidelity is unfavourable to the higher claſs of virtues, we are ſupported as well by facts as by reaſoning. We ſhould be ſorry to load our adverſaries with unmerited reproach; but to what hiſtory, to what record, will they appeal, for any traits of moral greatneſs, any ſacrifice of intereſt or life, any inſtances of daring heroic virtues exhibited by their diſciples? Where ſhall we look for the trophies of infidel magnanimity, or atheiſtical virtue? Not that we mean to accuſe them of inactivity: they have recently filled the world with the fame of their exploits; exploits of a different kind indeed, but of imperiſhable memory and diſaſtrous luſtre.

Though it is confeſſed, great and ſplendid actions are not the ordinary employment of life, but muſt, from their nature, be reſerved for high and eminent occaſions, yet, that ſyſtem is eſſentially defective which leaves no room for their cultivation. They are important, both from their immediate advantage and their remoter influence. They often ſave, and always illuſtrate, the age and nation in which they appear. They raiſe the ſtandard of morals;

arreſt the progreſs of degeneracy; and diffuſe a luſtre over the paths of life. They are noble monuments of the greatneſs of the human ſoul; and preſent to the world the auguſt image of virtue in her ſublimeſt form, from whence ſtreams of light and glory iſſue to remote times and ages; while their commemoration, by the pen of hiſtorians and poets, excites a noble emulation, and awakens in diſtant boſoms the ſparks of kindred excellence.

Combine the frequent and familiar perpetration of atrocious deeds, with the dearth of great and generous actions, and you have the exact picture of that condition of ſociety, which completes the degradation of the ſpecies; the frightful contraſt of dwarfiſh virtues and gigantic vices, where every thing that is good is mean and ſtunted in its growth, and every thing evil is rank and luxuriant; a ſickning uniformity prevails, and the ſoul aſſerts its native grandeur only in volcanic eruptions of anarchy and crime.

II. Hitherto we have conſidered the influence of Scepticiſm on the principles of virtue; and have endeavoured to ſhew that it deſpoils it of its dignity, and lays its authority in the duſt: it remains to examine its influence in the formation of the

character

character. The actions of men are oftener determined by their character than their intereſt: Their conduct takes its colour and complexion more from their acquired taſte, inclinations and habits, than from a deliberate regard to their greateſt good. It is only on ſome great occaſions that the mind awakes, to take an extended ſurvey of her whole courſe, and that ſhe ſuffers the dictates of reaſon to impreſs a new bias upon her movements; the actions of each day are, for the moſt part, links which follow each other in the chain of cuſtom. Hence the great effort of practical wiſdom is to imbue the mind with right taſtes, affections and habits; the elements of character and the maſters of action.

1. The excluſion of a ſupreme Being and of a ſuperintending Providence, tends directly to the deſtruction of moral taſte. It robs the univerſe of all finiſhed and conſummate excellence, even in idea. The admiration of perfect wiſdom and goodneſs, for which we are formed, and which kindles ſuch unſpeakable rapture in the ſoul, finding in the regions of Scepticiſm nothing to which it correſponds, droops and languiſhes. In a world which preſents a fair ſpectacle of the order and beauty of a

vaſt family nouriſhed and ſupported by an almighty Parent, in a world which leads the devout mind, ſtep by ſtep, to the contemplation of the firſt fair and the firſt good, the Sceptic is encompaſſed with nothing but obſcurity, meanneſs and diſorder.

When we reflect on the manner in which the idea of Deity is formed, we muſt be convinced that ſuch an idea intimately preſent to the mind, muſt have a moſt powerful effect in refining the moral taſte. Compoſed of the richeſt elements, it embraces in the character of a beneficent Parent and almighty Ruler, whatever is venerable in wiſdom, whatever is awful in authority, whatever is touching in goodneſs.

Human excellence is blended with many imperfections, and ſeen under many limitations; it is beheld only in detached and ſeparate portions, nor ever appears in any one character whole and entire: ſo that, if we wiſh, in imitation of the Stoics, to form out of theſe fragments the notion of a perfectly wiſe and good man, we know it is a mere abſtraction, a fiction of the mind, without any real being in whom it is embodied and realized. In the belief of a Deity theſe conceptions are reduced to reality: the ſcattered rays of an ideal excellence are concentrated

centrated and become the real attributes of that Being with whom we ſtand in the neareſt relation, who ſits ſupreme at the head of the univerſe, is armed with infinite power, and pervades all nature with his preſence.

The efficacy of theſe ſentiments, in producing and augmenting a virtuous taſte, will indeed be proportioned to the vividneſs with which they are formed, and the frequency with which they recur, yet ſome benefit will not fail to reſult from their exiſtence, even in their loweſt degree.

The idea of the ſupreme Being, has this peculiar property, that as it admits of no ſubſtitute, ſo from the firſt moment it is impreſſed, it is capable of continual growth and enlargement. God himſelf is immutable; but our conception of his character is continually receiving freſh acceſſions, is continually growing more extended and refulgent, by having transferred upon it new perceptions of beauty and goodneſs, by attracting to itſelf, as a centre, whatever bears the impreſs of dignity, order or happineſs. It borrows ſplendour from all that is fair, ſubordinates to itſelf all that is great, and ſits enthroned on the riches of the univerſe.

As the object of worſhip will always be, in a degree

gree, the object of imitation, hence ariſes a fixed ſtandard of moral excellence, by the contemplation of which the tendencies to corruption are counteracted, the contagion of bad example is checked, and human nature riſes above its natural level.

When the knowledge of God was loſt in the world, juſt ideas of virtue and moral obligation diſappeared along with it. How is it to be otherwiſe accounted for, that in the poliſhed nations, and in the enlightened times of pagan antiquity, the moſt unnatural luſts and deteſtable impurities were not only tolerated in private life *, but entered into their religion, and formed a material part of

* It is worthy of obſervation, that the elegant and philoſophic *Xenophon*, in delineating the model of a perfect Prince in the character of Cyrus, introduces a Mede who had formed an unnatural paſſion for his hero, and relates the incident in a lively, feſtive humour, without being in the leaſt conſcious of any indelicacy attached to it.

What muſt be the ſtate of manners in a country where a circumſtance of this kind, feigned, no doubt, by way of ornament, finds a place in ſuch a work? *Cyri Inſtit. Lib.* 1.

Deinde nobis qui *concedentibus philoſophis antiquis*, adoleſcentulis delectamur etiam vitia ſæpe jucunda ſunt. *Cicero De nat. Deo. Lib.* 1.

their

their public worſhip;* while among the Jews, a people ſo much inferior in every other branch of knowledge, the ſame vices were regarded with horror?

The reaſon is this; the true character of God, was unknown to the former, which, by the light of divine revelation was imparted to the latter. The former caſt their deities in the mould of their own imaginations, in conſequence of which they partook of the vices and defects of their worſhippers: to the latter, no ſcope was left for fancy or the wanderings of the heart, but a pure and perfect model was preſcribed.

Falſe and corrupt, however, as was the religion of the Pagans, (if it deſerve the name,) and defective, and often vicious, as was the character of their imaginary deities, it was ſtill better for the world, for the void of knowledge to be filled with theſe, than abandoned to a total Scepticiſm;

* ——*Nam quo non proſtat fœmina templo.* Juv.

The impurities practiſed in the worſhip of Iſis, an Egyptian Deity, roſe to ſuch a height, in the reign of *Tiberius*, that that profligate Prince thought fit to prohibit her worſhip, and at the ſame time inflicted on the prieſts the puniſhment of crucifixion. *Joſephus, Antiquit. Judaic L.* 18.

for

for though both ſyſtems are equally falſe, they are not equally pernicious. When the fictions of heatheniſm conſecrated the memory of its legiſlators and heroes, it gave them for the moſt part thoſe qualities which were in the greateſt repute. They were ſuppoſed to poſſeſs in the higheſt degree the virtues in which it was moſt honourable to excel, and to be the witneſſes, approvers and patrons, of thoſe perfections in others, by which their own character was chiefly diſtinguiſhed. Men ſaw, or rather fancied they ſaw, in theſe ſuppoſed deities, the qualities they moſt admired among themſelves, dilated to a larger ſize, moving in a higher ſphere, and aſſociated with the power, dignity and happineſs of ſuperior natures. With ſuch ideal models before them, and conceiving themſelves continually acting under the eye of ſuch ſpectators and judges, they felt a real elevation; their eloquence become more impaſſioned, their patriotiſm inflamed, and their courage exalted.

Revelation, by diſplaying the true character of God, affords a pure and perfect ſtandard of virtue; heatheniſm, one in many reſpects defective and vicious; the faſhionable ſcepticiſm of the preſent day, which

which excludes the belief of all ſuperior powers, affords no ſtandard at all. Human nature knows nothing better or higher than itſelf. All above and around it are ſhrouded in darkneſs, the virtues have no room to expand by the proſpect being confined to the tame realities of life; nor are any excurſions permitted into that unſeen world, the true element of the great and good, by which virtue is fortified with motives equally calculated to ſatisfy the reaſon, to delight the fancy and to impreſs the heart.

II. Modern Infidelity not only tends to corrupt the moral taſte; it alſo promotes the growth of thoſe vices which are the moſt hoſtile to ſocial happineſs. Of all the vices incident to human nature, the moſt deſtructive to ſociety are vanity, ferocity, and unbridled ſenſuality; and theſe are preciſely the vices which Infidelity is directly calculated to cheriſh.

That the love, fear and habitual contemplation of a being infinitely exalted, or in other words, Devotion, is adapted to promote a ſober and moderate eſtimate of our own excellencies is inconteſtible; nor is it leſs evident, that the excluſion of ſuch ſentiments muſt be favourable to pride. The evil and criminality of pride will, perhaps, be leſs

readily admitted; for though there is no vice ſo oppoſite to the ſpirit of Chriſtianity, yet there is none which, even in the Chriſtian world, has been treated with ſo much indulgence.

There is, it will be confeſſed, a delicate ſenſibility to character, a ſober deſire of reputation, a wiſh to poſſeſs the eſteem of the wiſe and good, felt by the pureſt minds, and which is at the fartheſt remove from arrogance or vanity. The humility of a noble mind ſcarcely dares to approve of itſelf, until it has ſecured the approbation of others. Very different is that reſtleſs deſire of diſtinction, that paſſion for theatrical diſplay, which inflames the heart and occupies the whole attention of vain men. This, of all the paſſions, is the moſt unſocial, avarice itſelf not excepted. The reaſon is plain. Property is a kind of good, which may be more eaſily attained, and is capable of more minute ſubdiviſions than fame. In the purſuit of wealth, men are led by an attention to their own intereſt, to promote the welfare of each other; their advantages are reciprocal; the benefits which each is anxious to acquire for himſelf, he reaps in the greateſt abundance from the union and conjunction of ſociety. The purſuits of vanity are quite

contrary

contrary. The portion of time and attention mankind are willing to ſpare from their avocations and pleaſures, to devote to the admiration of each other is ſo ſmall, that every ſucceſsful adventurer is felt to have diminiſhed the common ſtock. The ſucceſs of one is the diſappointment of multitudes. For though there be many rich, many virtuous, many wiſe men, fame muſt neceſſarily be the portion of few. Hence every vain man, every man in whom vanity is the ruling paſſion, regarding his rival as his enemy, is ſtrongly tempted, to rejoice in his miſcarriage and repine at his ſucceſs.

Beſides, as the paſſions are ſeldom ſeen in a ſimple, unmixed ſtate, ſo vanity when it ſucceeds, degenerates into arrogance; when it is diſappointed, (and it is often diſappointed) it is exaſperated into malignity and corrupted into envy. In this ſtage the vain man commences a determined miſanthropiſt. He deteſts that excellence which he cannot reach. He deteſts his ſpecies, and longs to be revenged upon them, for the unpardonable injuſtice he has ſuſtained in their being inſenſible of his merits. He lives upon the calamities of the world: the vices and miſeries of men are his element and his food. Virtue, talents and genius,

are his natural enemies, which he perſecutes with inſtinctive eagerneſs, and unrelenting hoſtility. Some have doubted of the exiſtence of ſuch a diſpoſition; they have ſuppoſed the diſintereſted hatred of mankind impoſſible; but it is certainly to be found amongſt the ſediments and dregs of diſappointed vanity. It is a diſeaſe which taints and vitiates the whole character wherever it prevails. It forms the heart to a profound indifference to the welfare of others; ſo that whatever appearances he may aſſume, or however wide the circle of his ſeeming virtues may extend, you will infallibly find the vain man is his own centre. Attentive only to himſelf, abſorbed in the contemplation of his own perfections, inſtead of feeling tenderneſs for his fellow creatures as members of the ſame family, as beings with whom he is appointed to act, to ſuffer and to ſympathize; he conſiders life as a ſtage on which he is performing a part, and mankind in no other light than ſpectators. Whether he ſmiles or frowns, whether his path is adorned with the rays of beneficence or his ſteps are died in blood, an attention to ſelf is the ſpring of every movement, and the motive to which every action is referred.

His

His apparent good qualities loſe all their worth, by loſing all that is ſimple, genuine and natural: they are even preſſed into the ſervice of vanity, and become the means of enlarging its power. The truly good man is jealous over himſelf, leſt the notoriety of his beſt actions by blending itſelf with their motive, ſhould diminiſh their value; the vain man performs the ſame actions for the ſake of that notoriety. The good man quietly diſcharges his duty and ſhuns oſtentation; the vain man conſiders every good deed loſt that is not publicly diſplayed. The one is intent upon realities, the other upon ſemblances: the one aims to *be* virtuous, the other to *appear* ſo.

Nor is a mind inflated with vanity more diſqualified for right action than juſt ſpeculation; or better diſpoſed to the purſuit of truth than the practice of virtue. To ſuch a mind the ſimplicity of truth is diſguſting. Careleſs of the improvement of mankind, and intent only upon aſtoniſhing them with the appearance of novelty; the glare of paradox will be preferred to the light of truth; opinions will be embraced, not becauſe they are juſt, but becauſe they are new: the more flagitious, the more ſubverſive of morals, the more alarming to

the wiſe and good, the more welcome to men who eſtimate their literary powers by the miſchief they produce, and who conſider the degree of anxiety and terror they impreſs as the meaſure of their renown. Truth is ſimple and uniform, while error may be infinitely varied; and as it is one thing to ſtart paradoxes and another to make diſcoveries, we need the leſs wonder at the prodigious increaſe of modern philoſophers.

We have been ſo much accuſtomed to conſider extravagant ſelf-eſtimation merely as a *ridiculous* quality, that many will be ſurpriſed to find it treated as a vice, pregnant with ſerious miſchief to ſociety. But to form a judgement of its influence on the manners and happineſs of a nation, it is neceſſary only to look at its effects in a family; for bodies of men are only collections of individuals, and the greateſt nation is nothing more than an aggregate of a number of families. Conceive of a domeſtic circle, in which each member is elated with a moſt extravagant opinion of himſelf, and a proportionable contempt of every other, is full of little contrivances to catch applauſe, and whenever he is not praiſed is ſullen and diſappointed; what a picture of diſunion, diſguſt and animoſity would

ſuch

ſuch a family preſent; how utterly would domeſtic affection be extinguiſhed, and all the purpoſes of domeſtic ſociety be defeated! The general prevalence of ſuch diſpoſitions muſt be accompanied by an equal proportion of general miſery. The tendency of pride to produce ſtrife and hatred, is ſufficiently apparent from the pains men have been at to conſtruct a ſyſtem of politeneſs, which is nothing more than a ſort of mimic humility in which the ſentiments of an offenſive ſelf-eſtimation are ſo far diſguiſed and ſuppreſſed, as to make them compatible with the ſpirit of ſociety; ſuch a mode of behaviour as would naturally reſult from an attention to the apoſtolic injunction: *Let nothing be done through ſtrife or vain glory: but in lowlineſs of mind, let each eſteem other better than themſelves.* But if the ſemblance is of ſuch importance, how much more uſeful the reality: if the mere garb of humility is of ſuch indiſpenſible neceſſity, that without it ſociety could not ſubſiſt, how much better ſtill would the harmony of the world be preſerved were the condeſcenſion, deference and reſpect ſo ſtudiouſly diſplayed, a true picture of the heart?

The ſame reſtleſs and eager vanity which diſturbs a family, when it is permitted in a great national

national criſis to mingle with political affairs, diſtracts a kingdom; infuſing into thoſe entruſted with the enaction of laws a ſpirit of raſh innovation and daring empiriciſm, a diſdain of the eſtabliſhed uſages of mankind, a fooliſh deſire to dazzle the world with new and untried ſyſtems of policy, in which the precedents of antiquity and the experience of ages are only conſulted to be trodden under foot; and into the executive department of government, a fierce contention for pre-eminence, an inceſſant ſtruggle to ſupplant and deſtroy, with a propenſity to calumny and ſuſpicion, proſcription and maſſacre.

We ſhall ſuffer the moſt eventful ſeaſon ever witneſſed in the affairs of men, to paſs over our heads to very little purpoſe, if we fail to learn from it ſome awful leſſons on the nature and progreſs of the paſſions: we ſhall contemplate the French Revolution to little advantage, unleſs we conſider it in the light of a grand experiment on human nature. Among the various paſſions which that Revolution has ſo ſtrikingly diſplayed, none is more conſpicuous than vanity; nor is it difficult without adverting to the national character of the people, to account for its extraordinary

dinary predominance. Political power, the moſt ſeducing object of ambition, never before circulated through ſo many hands; the proſpect of poſſeſſing it was never before preſented to ſo many minds. Multitudes, who by their birth and education, and not unfrequently by their talents, ſeemed deſtined to perpetual obſcurity, were, by the alternate riſe and fall of parties, elevated into diſtinction and ſhared in the functions of government. The ſhort lived forms of power and office, glided with ſuch rapidity through ſucceſſive ranks of degradation, from the court to the very dregs of the populace, that they ſeemed rather to ſolicit acceptance than to be a prize contended for:* yet, as it was ſtill impoſſible for all to poſſeſs authority, though none were willing to obey, and the pride of every unſucceſsful competitor was piqued by ſeeing his neighbour promoted, while he himſelf was neglected; a general impatience to break the ranks and ruſh into the foremoſt ground, maddened and infuriated the nation, and overwhelmed law, order and civilization, with the violence of a torrent.

* —— Nequo pulſat pede pauperum tabernas
Regum que turres. Hor.

If ſuch be the miſchiefs both in public and private life reſulting from an exceſſive ſelf-eſtimation, it remains next to be conſidered whether providence has ſupplied any medicine to correct it; for as the reflection on excellencies, whether real or imaginary, is always attended with pleaſure to the poſſeſſor, pride is a diſeaſe deeply ſeated in our nature.

Suppoſe there were a great and glorious Being always preſent with us, who had given us exiſtence with numberleſs other bleſſings, and on whom we depended each inſtant, as well for every preſent enjoyment as for every hope of future good; ſuppoſe again we had incurred the juſt diſpleaſure of ſuch a Being, by ingratitude and diſobedience, yet that in great mercy he had not caſt us off, but had aſſured us he was willing to pardon and reſtore us, on our humble intreaty and ſincere repentance: ſay, would not, an habitual ſenſe of the preſence of this Being, ſelf-reproach for having diſpleaſed him, and an anxiety to recover his favour, be the moſt effectual antidote to pride? But ſuch are the leading diſcoveries made by the Chriſtian Revelation, and ſuch the diſpoſitions which a practical belief of it inſpires.

Humility

Humility is the firſt fruit of religion. In the mouth of our Lord there is no maxim ſo frequent as the following, *Whoſoever exalteth himſelf ſhall be abaſed, and he that humbleth himſelf ſhall be exalted.* Religion, and that alone, teaches *abſolute* humility, by which I mean a ſenſe of our *abſolute* nothingneſs in the view of infinite greatneſs and excellence. That ſenſe of inferiority which reſults from the compariſon of men with each other, is often an unwelcome ſentiment forced upon the mind, which may rather embitter the temper than ſoften it: that which devotion impreſſes, is ſoothing and delightful. The devout man loves to lie low at the foot-ſtool of his creator, becauſe it is then he attains the moſt lively perceptions of the divine excellence, and the moſt tranquil confidence in the divine favour. In ſo auguſt a preſence, he ſees all diſtinctions loſt, all beings reduced to the ſame level; he can look at his ſuperiors without envy, and his inferiors without contempt; and when from this elevation he deſcends to mix in ſociety, the conviction of ſuperiority which muſt, in many inſtances be felt, is a calm inference of the underſtanding, and no longer a buſy, importunate paſſion of the heart.

The wicked, ſays the Pſalmiſt, *through the pride of their countenance will not ſeek after God: God is not in all their thoughts.* When we conſider the incredible vanity of the Atheiſtical ſect, together with the ſettled malignity, and unrelenting rancour with which they purſue every veſtige of religion; is it uncandid to ſuppoſe, that its humbling tendency is one principal cauſe of their enmity; that they are eager to diſplace a Deity from the minds of men, that they may occupy the void; to crumble the throne of the Eternal into duſt, that they may elevate themſelves on its ruins; and that as their licentiouſneſs is impatient of reſtraint, ſo their pride diſdains a ſuperior?

We mentioned a ferocity of character, as one effect of ſceptical impiety. It is an inconvenience attending a controverſy with thoſe with whom we have few principles in common, that we are often in danger of reaſoning inconcluſively, for the want of its being clearly known and ſettled what our opponents admit and what they deny. The perſons, for example, with whom we are at preſent engaged, have diſcarded humility and modeſty from the catalogue of virtues; on which account we have employed the more time in evincing their impor-

importance: but whatever may be thought of humility as a *virtue*, it ſurely will not be denied that inhumanity is a moſt deteſtable *vice*; a vice, however, which Scepticiſm has a moſt powerful tendency to inflame.

As we have already ſhewn that pride hardens the heart, and that Religion is the only effectual antidote, the connection betwixt irreligion and inhumanity is, in this view, obvious. But there is another light in which this part of the ſubject may be viewed, in my humble opinion, much more important though ſeldom adverted to. The ſuppoſition that man is a moral and accountable being, deſtined to ſurvive the ſtroke of death and to live in a future world in a never ending ſtate of happineſs or miſery, makes him a creature of incomparably more *conſequence*, than the oppoſite ſuppoſition. When we conſider him as placed here by an almighty Ruler, in a ſtate of probation, and that the preſent life is his period of trial, the firſt link in a vaſt and interminable chain which ſtretches into eternity, he aſſumes an awful and dignified character in our eyes. Every thing which relates to him becomes intereſting; and to trifle with his happineſs is felt to be the moſt unpardonable levity.

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If ſuch be the deſtination of man, it is evident, that in the qualities which fit him for it, his principal dignity conſiſts: his moral greatneſs is his true greatneſs. Let the ſceptical principles be admitted, which repreſent him, on the contrary, as the offſpring of chance, connected with no ſuperior power, and ſinking into annihilation at death, and he is a contemptible creature whoſe exiſtence and happineſs are inſignificant. The characteriſtic difference is loſt betwixt him and the brute creation, from which he is no longer diſtinguiſhed, except by the vividneſs and multiplicity of his perceptions.

If we reflect on that part of our nature which diſpoſes us to humanity, we ſhall find that where we have no particular attachment, our ſympathy with the ſufferings, and concern for the deſtruction of ſenſitive beings, is in proportion to their ſuppoſed importance in the general ſcale; or, in other words, to their ſuppoſed capacity of enjoyment. We feel, for example, much more at witneſſing the deſtruction of a man than of an inferior animal, becauſe we conſider it as involving the extinction of a much greater ſum of happineſs. For the ſame reaſon, he who would ſhudder at the ſlaughter of a large animal, will ſee a thouſand inſects periſh without

without a pang. Our ſympathy with the calamities of our fellow creatures is adjuſted to the ſame proportions. For we feel more powerfully affected with the diſtreſſes of fallen greatneſs, than with equal or greater diſtreſſes ſuſtained by perſons of inferior rank; becauſe, having been accuſtomed to aſſociate with an elevated ſtation the idea of ſuperior happineſs, the loſs appears the greater, and the wreck more extenſive. But the diſproportion in importance, betwixt man and the meaneſt inſect is not ſo great, as that which ſubſiſts betwixt man conſidered as *mortal* and as *immortal*, that is, betwixt man as he is repreſented by the ſyſtem of Scepticiſm and that of divine Revelation: for the enjoyment of the meaneſt inſect bears ſome proportion, though a very ſmall one, to the preſent happineſs of man; but the happineſs of time bears none at all to that of eternity. The Sceptical ſyſtem, therefore, ſinks the importance of human exiſtence, to an inconceivable degree.

From theſe principles reſults the following important inference, that to extinguiſh human life by the hand of violence, muſt be quite a different thing in the eyes of a Sceptic from what it is in thoſe of a Chriſtian. With the Sceptic it is nothing more than

than diverting the courſe of a little red fluid called blood; it is merely leſſening the number by one of many millions of fugitive contemptible creatures: the Chriſtian ſees in the ſame event, an accountable being cut off from a ſtate of probation and hurried perhaps, unprepared, into the preſence of his judge, to hear that final, that irrevocable ſentence, which is to fix him for ever in an unalterable condition of felicity or woe. The former perceives in death, nothing but its phyſical circumſtances; the latter is impreſſed with the magnitude of its moral conſequences. It is the moral relation which man is ſuppoſed to bear to a ſuperior power, the awful idea of accountability, the influence which his preſent diſpoſitions and actions are conceived to have upon his eternal deſtiny, more than any ſuperiority of intellectual powers, abſtracted from theſe conſiderations, which inveſt him with ſuch myſterious grandeur, and conſtitute the firmeſt guard on the ſanctuary of human life. This reaſoning, it is true, ſerves more *immediately* to ſhew how the diſbelief of a future ſtate endangers the ſecurity of human life; but though this be its *direct* conſequence, it extends by analogy much farther: ſince he who has learned to ſport with the

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lives of his fellow creatures, will feel but little ſolicitude for their welfare in any other inſtance; but, as the greater includes the leſs, will eaſily paſs from this to all the inferior gradations of barbarity.

As the advantage of the armed over the unarmed is not ſeen till the moment of attack, ſo in that tranquil ſtate of ſociety in which law and order maintain their aſcendancy, it is not perceived, perhaps, not even ſuſpected, to what an alarming degree the principles of modern infidelity leave us naked and defenceleſs. But, let the ſtate be convulſed, let the mounds of regular authority be once overflowed, and the ſtill ſmall voice of law drowned in the tempeſt of popular fury, events which recent experience ſhews to be poſſible, it will then be ſeen that Atheiſm is a ſchool of ferocity; and that having taught its diſciples to conſider mankind as little better than a neſt of inſects, they will be prepared, in the fierce conflicts of party, to trample upon them without pity, and extinguiſh them without remorſe.

It was late* before the atheiſm of Epicurus

* Neque enim aſſentior iis qui *hæc nuper* diſſerare cœperunt cum corporibus ſimul animos interire atque omnia morte deleri. *Cicero de Amicitia.*

gained footing at Rome, but its prevalence was ſoon followed by ſuch ſcenes of proſcription, confiſcation, and blood as were *then* unparalleled in the hiſtory of the world; from which the Republic being never able to recover itſelf, after many unſucceſsful ſtruggles, exchanged liberty for repoſe, by ſubmiſſion to abſolute power. Such were the effects of Atheiſm at Rome. An attempt has been recently made to eſtabliſh the ſame ſyſtem in France, the conſequences of which are too well known, to render it requiſite for me to ſhock your feelings by a recital. The only doubt that can ariſe is, whether the barbarities which have ſtained the Revolution in that unhappy country are juſtly chargeable on the prevalence of Atheiſm. If there are any who are not fully convinced of this, let them recollect that the men, who by their activity and talents, prepared the minds of the people for that great change, *Voltaire*, *D'Alembert*, *Diderot*, *Rouſſeau* and others, were avowed enemies of Revelation; that in all their writings, the diffuſion of Sceptiſiſm and of revolutionary principles went hand in hand; that the fury of the moſt ſanguinary parties was eſpecially pointed againſt the Chriſtian prieſthood and Religious inſtitutions, without once

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pretending, like other perſecutors, to execute the vengeance of God, (whoſe name they never mentioned) upon his enemies; that their atrocities were committed with a wanton levity and brutal merriment; that the reign of Atheiſm was avowedly and expreſsly the reign of terror; that in the height of their career, in the higheſt climax of their horrors, they ſhut up the temples of God, aboliſhed his worſhip, and proclaimed death to be an eternal ſleep; as if, by pointing to the ſilence of the ſepulchre, and the ſleep of the dead, theſe ferocious barbarians meant to apologiſe for leaving neither ſleep, quiet nor repoſe to the living.

As the heathens fabled that Minerva iſſued full armed from the head of Jupiter; ſo no ſooner were the ſpeculations of atheiſtical philoſophy matured, than they gave birth to a ferocity which converted the moſt poliſhed people in Europe into a horde of aſſaſſins; the ſeat of voluptuous refinement, of pleaſure and of arts, into a theatre of crimes and blood.

Having already ſhewn, that the principles of Infidelity facilitate the commiſſion of crimes by removing the reſtraints of fear, and that they foſter the arrogance of the individual, while they inculcate the moſt deſpicable opinion of the ſpecies;

the inevitable reſult is, that a haughty ſelf-confidence, a contempt of mankind, together with a daring defiance of religious reſtraints, are the natural ingredients of the atheiſtical character; nor is it leſs evident that theſe are, of all others, the diſpoſitions which moſt forcibly ſtimulate to violence and cruelty.

Settle it, therefore, in your minds, as a maxim never to be effaced or forgotten, that Atheiſm is an inhuman, bloody, ferocious ſyſtem, equally hoſtile to every uſeful reſtraint, and to every virtuous affection; that, leaving nothing above us to excite awe, nor around us to awaken tenderneſs, it wages war with heaven and with earth; its firſt object is to dethrone God, its next to deſtroy man*.

There is a third vice, not leſs deſtructive to ſociety than either of thoſe which have been already mentioned, to which the ſyſtem of modern Infi-

* As human nature is the ſame in all ages, it is not ſurpriſing to find the ſame moral ſyſtems even in the moſt diſſimilar circumſtances, produce correſponding effects. *Joſephus* remarks that the Sadducees, a kind of Jewiſh Infidels, whoſe tenets were the denial of a moral government and a future ſtate, were diſtinguiſhed from the other ſects by their ferocity. *De Bell. Jud. lib. 2.* He elſewhere remarks, that they were eminent for their inhumanity in their judicial capacity.

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delity is favourable, that is, unbridled ſenſuality, the licentious and unreſtrained indulgence of thoſe paſſions which are eſſential to the continuation of the ſpecies. The magnitude of theſe paſſions, and their ſupreme importance to the exiſtence as well as the peace and welfare of ſociety, have rendered it one of the firſt objects of ſolicitude with every wiſe legiſlature, to reſtrain them by ſuch laws, and to confine their indulgence within ſuch limits, as ſhall beſt promote the great ends for which they were implanted.

The benevolence and wiſdom of the Author of Chriſtianity are eminently conſpicuous in the laws he has enacted on this branch of morals; for, while he authoriſes Marriage, he reſtrains the vagrancy and caprice of the paſſions by forbidding Polygamy and Divorce; and, well knowing that offences againſt the laws of chaſtity uſually ſpring from an ill regulated imagination, he inculcates purity of heart. Among innumerable benefits which the world has derived from the Chriſtian Religion, a ſuperior refinement in the ſexual ſentiments, a more equal and reſpectful treatment of women, greater dignity and permanence conferred on the inſtitution of Marriage, are not the leaſt conſiderable;

able; in conſequence of which the pureſt affections, the nobleſt friendſhips and the moſt ſacred duties, are grafted on the ſtock of the ſtrongeſt inſtincts.

The aim of all the leading champions of Infidelity is, to rob mankind of theſe benefits, and throw them back into a ſtate of groſs and brutal ſenſuality. Mr. *Hume* aſſerts adultery to be but a ſlight offence *when known*; *when ſecret*, no crime at all. In the ſame ſpirit he repreſents the private conduct of the profligate *Charles*, whoſe debaucheries polluted the age, as a juſt ſubject of panegyric. A diſciple in the ſame ſchool, has lately had the unblushing effrontery to ſtigmatiſe Marriage as the worſt of all monopolies; and in a narrative of his licentious amours, to make a formal apology for departing from his principles, by ſubmitting to its reſtraints. The popular productions on the continent, which iſſue from the atheiſtical ſchool, are inceſſantly directed to the ſame purpoſe.

Under every poſſible aſpect in which Infidelity can be viewed, it extends the dominion of ſenſuality: it repeals and abrogates every law by which divine Revelation has, under ſuch awful ſanctions, reſtrained the indulgence of the paſſions:

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the diſbelief of a ſupreme, omniſcient Being, which it inculcates, releaſes its diſciples from an attention to the *heart*, from every care but the preſervation of outward decorum; and the excluſion of the devout affections and an unſeen world, leaves the mind immerſed in viſible, ſenſible objects.

There are two ſorts of pleaſures, corporeal and mental: Though we are indebted to the ſenſes for all our perceptions *originally*, yet thoſe which are at the fartheſt remove from their *immediate impreſſions*, confer the moſt elevation on the character; ſince, in proportion as they are multiplied and augmented, the ſlaviſh ſubjection to the ſenſes is ſubdued. Hence the true and only antidote to debaſing ſenſuality is, the poſſeſſion of a fund of that *kind of enjoyment* which is independent of the corporeal appetites. Inferior in the perfection of ſeveral of his ſenſes to different parts of the brute creation, the ſuperiority of man over them all conſiſts in his ſuperior power of multiplying, by new combinations, his mental perceptions, and thereby of creating to himſelf, reſources of happineſs, ſeparate from external ſenſation. In the ſcale of enjoyment, the firſt remove from ſenſe are the pleaſures of reaſon and ſociety; the next, are the pleaſures

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of Devotion and Religion. The former, though totally diſtinct from thoſe of ſenſe, are yet leſs perfectly adapted to moderate their exceſſes than the laſt; as they are in a great meaſure converſant with viſible and ſenſible objects.—The religious affections and ſentiments are, in fact, and were intended to be, the *proper antagoniſt* of ſenſuality, the great deliverer from the thraldom of the appetites; by opening a ſpiritual world, and inſpiring hopes, and fears, and conſolations, and joys, which bear no relation to the material and ſenſible univerſe. The criminal indulgence of ſenſual paſſions admits but of two modes of prevention; the eſtabliſhment of ſuch laws and maxims in ſociety as ſhall render lewd profligacy impracticable or infamous, or, the infuſion of ſuch principles and habits as ſhall render it diſtaſteful: human legiſlatures have encountered the diſeaſe in the firſt; the truths and ſanctions of revealed religion, in the laſt, of theſe methods: to both of which the advocates of modern Infidelity are equally hoſtile.

So much has been ſaid by many able writers to evince the inconceivable benefit of the marriage inſtitution, that to hear it ſeriouſly attacked by men who ſtile themſelves Philoſophers, at the cloſe

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of the eighteenth century, muſt awaken indignation and ſurpriſe. The object of this diſcourſe, leads us to direct our attention particularly to the influence of this inſtitution on the *civilization* of the world.

From the records of Revelation, we learn that Marriage, or the *permanent union* of the ſexes, was ordained by God, and exiſted under different modifications in the early infancy of mankind, without which they could never have emerged from barbariſm. For, conceive only what eternal diſcord jealouſy and violence would enſue, were the objects of the tendereſt affections ſecured to their poſſeſſor by no law or tie of moral obligation; were domeſtic enjoyments diſturbed by inceſſant fear, and licentiouſneſs inflamed by hope. Who could find ſufficient tranquillity of mind, to enable him to plan or execute any continued ſcheme of action, or what room for arts, or ſciences, or religion, or virtue, in that ſtate in which the chief earthly happineſs was expoſed to every lawleſs invader; where one was racked with an inceſſant anxiety to keep what the other was equally eager to acquire? It is not probable in itſelf, independent of the light of ſcripture, that the benevolent Author of the

human race ever placed them in ſo wretched a condition at firſt; it is certain they could not remain in it long without being exterminated. Marriage, by ſhutting out theſe evils, and enabling every man to reſt ſecure in his enjoyments, is the great civilizer of the world: With this ſecurity the mind is at liberty to expand in generous affections, has leiſure to look abroad, and engage in the purſuits of knowledge, ſcience and virtue.

Nor is it in this way only that marriage inſtitutions are eſſential to the welfare of mankind. They are the ſources of tenderneſs, as well as the guardians of peace. Without the permanent union of the ſexes, there can be no permanent families: the diſſolution of nuptial ties involves the diſſolution of domeſtic ſociety. But domeſtic ſociety is the ſeminary of ſocial affections, the cradle of ſenſibility, where the firſt elements are acquired of that tenderneſs and humanity, which cement mankind together, and which, were they entirely extinguiſhed, the whole fabric of ſocial inſtitutions would be diſſolved.

Families are ſo many centres of attraction, which preſerve mankind from being ſcattered and diſſi-

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pated by the repulſive powers of ſelfiſhneſs. The order of nature is, evermore, from particulars to generals. As in the operations of intellect, we proceed from the contemplation of individuals to the formation of general abſtractions, ſo in the developement of the paſſions in like manner, we advance from private to public affections, from the love of parents, brothers and ſiſters, to thoſe more expanded regards which embrace the immenſe ſociety of human kind *.

In order to render men benevolent, they muſt firſt be made tender; for benevolent affections are not the offspring of reaſoning; they reſult from that culture of the heart, from thoſe early impreſſions of tenderneſs, gratitude and ſympathy, which the endearments of domeſtic life are ſure to ſupply, and for the formation of which it is the beſt poſſible ſchool.

* Arctior vero colligatio ſocietatis propinquorum: ab illa enim immenſa ſocietate humani generis, in exiguum anguſtumque concluditur, nam cum ſit hoc natura commune animantium ut habeant libidem procreandi prima ſocietas in ipſo conjugio eſt, proxima in liberis deinde una domus, communia omnia. Id autem eſt principium urbis, et quaſi ſeminarium reipublicæ. *Cic. de Off.*

The advocates of Infidelity invert this eternal order of nature. Inſtead of inculcating the private affections, as a diſcipline by which the mind is prepared for thoſe of a more public nature, they ſet them in direct oppoſition to each other; they propoſe to build general benevolence on the deſtruction of individual tenderneſs, and to make us love the whole ſpecies more, by loving every particular part of it leſs. In purſuit of this chimerical project, gratitude, humility, conjugal, parental, and filial affection, together with every other ſocial diſpoſition, are reprobated; virtue is limited to a paſſionate attachment to the general good. Is it not natural to aſk, when all the tenderneſs of life is extinguiſhed, and all the bands of ſociety are untwiſted, from whence this ardent affection for the general good is to ſpring?

When this ſavage philoſophy has completed its work, when it has taught its diſciple to look with perfect indifference on the offſpring of his body and the wife of his boſom, to eſtrange himſelf from his friends, inſult his benefactors, and ſilence the pleadings of gratitude and pity, will he by thus diveſting himſelf of all that is human, be better prepared for the diſintereſted love of his ſpecies?

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Will he become a philanthropiſt only becauſe he has ceaſed to be a man? Rather, if theſe principles have their full effect, in this total exemption from all the feelings which humanize and ſoften, in this chilling froſt of univerſal indifference, may we not be certain ſelfiſhneſs, unmingled and uncontrouled, will aſſume the empire of his heart; and that under pretence of advancing the general good, an object to which the fancy may give innumerable ſhapes, he will be prepared for the violation of every duty, and the perpetration of every crime? Extended benevolence is the laſt and moſt perfect fruit of the private affections; ſo that to expect to reap the former from the extinction of the latter, is to oppoſe the means to the end; is as abſurd as to attempt to reach the ſummit of the higheſt mountain, without paſſing through the intermediate ſpaces, or to hope to attain the heights of ſcience by forgetting the firſt elements of knowledge. Theſe abſurdities have ſprung, however, in the advocates of Infidelity, from an ignorance of human nature, ſufficient to diſgrace even thoſe who did not ſtile themſelves Philoſophers. Preſuming, contrary to the experience of every moment, that the affections are awakened by *reaſoning*,

ing, and perceiving that the general good is an incomparably greater *object in itſelf*, than the happineſs of any limited number of individuals, they inferred nothing more was neceſſary than to exhibit it in its juſt dimenſions, to draw the *affections* towards it, and concentrate them in its purſuit; as though the fact of the ſuperior populouſneſs of China to Great Britain, needed but to be known, to render us indifferent to our domeſtic concerns, and lead us to direct all our anxiety, to the proſperity of that vaſt, but remote Empire.

It is not the province of reaſon to awaken new paſſions, or open new ſources of ſenſibility, but to direct us in the attainment of thoſe objects which nature has already rendered pleaſing, or to determine among the interfering inclinations and paſſions which ſway the mind, which are the fitteſt to be preferred.

Is a regard to the general good then, you will reply, to be excluded from the motives of action? Nothing is more remote from my intention: but as the nature of this motive has, in my opinion, been much miſunderſtood by ſome good men, and abuſed by others of a different deſcription, to the worſt of purpoſes, permit me to declare in a few words

words, what appears to me to be the truth on this ſubject.

The welfare of the whole ſyſtem of being muſt be allowed to be *in itſelf*, the object of all others the moſt worthy of being purſued; ſo that, could the mind diſtinctly embrace it, and diſcern at every ſtep *what action* would infallibly promote it, we ſhould be furniſhed with a ſure criterion of right and wrong, an unerring guide, which would ſuperſede the uſe and neceſſity of all inferior rules, laws and principles.

But this being impoſſible, ſince the good of the *whole* is a motive ſo looſe and indeterminate, and embraces ſuch an infinity of relations, that before we could be certain what action it preſcribed, the ſeaſon of action would be paſſed; to weak, ſhort-ſighted mortals, Providence has aſſigned a ſphere of agency, leſs grand and extenſive indeed, but better ſuited to their limited powers, by implanting certain *affections* which it is their duty to cultivate, and ſuggeſting particular rules to which they are bound to conform. By theſe proviſions, the boundaries of virtue are eaſily aſcertained, at the ſame time that its ultimate object, the good of the whole, is ſecured; for, ſince the happineſs of the entire

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ſyſtem reſults from the happineſs of the ſeveral parts, the affections which confine the attention *immediately* to the latter, conſpire in the end to the promotion of the former; as the labourer whoſe induſtry is limited to a corner of a large building, performs his part towards rearing the ſtructure, much more effectually than if he extended his care to the whole.

As the intereſt, however, of any limited number of perſons may not only not contribute, but may poſſibly be directly oppoſed to the general good; the intereſt of a family, for example, to that of a province, or, of a nation to that of the world; Providence has ſo ordered it, that in a well regulated mind there ſprings up, as we have already ſeen, beſides particular attachments, *an extended regard to the ſpecies*, whoſe office is twofold; not to *deſtroy* and *extinguiſh* the more private affections, which is mental parricide; but firſt, as far as is conſiſtent with the claims of thoſe who are immediately committed to our care, *to do good to all men*; ſecondly, to exerciſe a juriſdiction and controll over the private affections, ſo as to prohibit their indulgence, whenever it would be attended with *manifeſt detriment* to the whole. Thus every part of our nature

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is brought into action; all the practical principles of the human heart find an element to move in, each in its different ſort and manner, conſpiring without mutual colliſions, to maintain the harmony of the world and the happineſs of the univerſe *.

Before

* It is ſomewhat ſingular, that many of the faſhionable Infidels have hit upon a definition of virtue which perfectly coincides with that of certain metaphyſical divines in America, firſt invented and defended by that moſt acute reaſoner *Jonathan Edwards*. They both place virtue, excluſively, in a paſſion for the general good, or, as Mr. *Edwards* expreſſes it, *love to Being in general*; ſo that our love is always to be proportioned to the magnitude of its object in the great ſcale of Being; which is liable to the objections I have already ſtated, as well as to many others, which the limits of this note will not permit me to enumerate. Let it ſuffice to remark, 1. That virtue, on theſe principles, is an utter impoſſibility, for the ſyſtem of Being, comprehending the great Supreme, is *infinite*, and therefore to maintain the proper proportion, the force of particular attachment muſt be infinitely leſs than the paſſion for the general good; but the limits of the human mind are not capable of any emotions ſo infinitely different *in degree*. 2. Since *our views* of the extent of the univerſe are capable of perpetual enlargement, admitting the ſum of exiſtence is ever the ſame, we muſt return back at each ſtep to diminiſh the ſtrength of particular affections, or they will become diſproportionate, and conſequently on theſe principles

 vicious;

Before I close this discourse, I cannot omit to mention three circumstances attending the propagation of Infidelity, by its present abettors, equally new and alarming.

1. It is the first attempt which has been ever witnessed on an extensive scale, to establish *the principles*

vicious; so that the balance must be continually fluctuating, by the weights being taken out of one scale and put into the other. 3. If virtue consists *exclusively* in love to Being in general, or attachment to the general good, the particular affections are to every purpose of virtue useless, and even pernicious; for their immediate, nay their necessary tendency is, to attract to their objects a proportion of attention, which far exceeds their comparative value in the general scale. To allege that the *general good* is promoted by them will be of no advantage to the defence of this system, but the contrary, by confessing that a greater sum of happiness is attained by a deviation from, than an adherence to, its principles; unless its advocates mean by the love of Being in general, the same thing as the private affections, which is to confound all the distinctions of language, as well as all the operations of mind. Let it be remembered, we have no dispute respecting what is the ultimate end of virtue, which is allowed on both sides to be the greatest sum of happiness in the universe; the question is merely, what is *virtue itself?* or, in other words, what are the means appointed for the attainment of that end?

There is little doubt, from some parts of Mr. *Godwin's* work,

principles of Atheiſm; the firſt effort which hiſtory has recorded to diſannul and extinguiſh the belief of all ſuperior powers; the conſequence of which, ſhould it ſucceed, will be to place mankind in a ſituation never before experienced, not even during the

work, entitled "*Political Juſtice*," as well as from his early habits of reading, that he was indebted to Mr. *Edwards* for his principal arguments againſt the private affections; though, with a daring conſiſtence, he has purſued his principles to an extreme from which that moſt excellent man would have revolted with horror.—The fundamental error of the whole ſyſtem aroſe, as I conceive, from a miſtaken purſuit of ſimplicity; from a wiſh to conſtruct a moral ſyſtem without leaving ſufficient ſcope for the infinite variety of moral phœnomena and mental combination; in conſequence of which, its advocates were induced to place virtue *excluſively* in ſome *one diſpoſition* of mind, and ſince the paſſion for the general good is undeniably the *nobleſt* and moſt extenſive of all others, when it was once reſolved to place virtue in any *one thing*, there remained little room to heſitate which ſhould be preferred. It might have been worth while to reflect, that in the Natural world there are two kinds of attraction; one, which holds the ſeveral *parts* of individual bodies in contact; another, which maintains the union of bodies themſelves with the general ſyſtem; and that though the union in the former caſe is much more *intimate* than in the latter, they are equally eſſential to the order of the world. Similar to this is the relation which the public and private affections bear to each other, and their uſe in the Moral ſyſtem,

the ages of pagan darkneſs. The ſyſtem of Polytheiſm was as remote from modern Infidelity as from true Religion. Amidſt that rubbiſh of ſuperſtition, the product of fear, ignorance and vice, which had been accumulating for ages, ſome faint embers of ſacred truth remained unextinguiſhed; the interpoſition of unſeen powers in the affairs of men was believed and revered, the ſanctity of oaths was maintained, the idea of *revelation* and of *tradition* as a ſource of religious knowledge, was familiar, a uſeful perſuaſion of the exiſtence of a future world was kept alive, and the greater Gods were looked up to as the guardians of the public welfare, the Patrons of thoſe virtues which promote the proſperity of ſtates, and the avengers of injuſtice perfidy and fraud*.

Of

* The teſtimony of *Polybius*, to the beneficial effects which reſulted from the ſyſtem of Pagan ſuperſtition, in fortifying the ſentiments of moral obligation, and ſupporting the ſanctity of oaths, is ſo weighty and deciſive, that it would be an injuſtice to the ſubject not to inſert it; more eſpecially as it is impoſſible to attribute it to the influence of credulity on the author himſelf, who was evidently a ſceptic. It is ſcarcely neceſſary to remark, that all the benefits which might in any way flow from ſuperſtition, are ſecured to an incomparably greater degree by the belief of true Religion.

"But

Of whatever benefit ſuperſtition might be productive heretofore, by the ſcattered particles of truth which it contained, theſe advantages can now only be reaped from the ſoil of true Religion; nor is there

" But among all the uſeful inſtitutions," ſays *Polybius*, " that demonſtrate the ſuperior excellence of the Roman government, the moſt conſiderable, perhaps, is the opinion which people are taught to hold concerning the Gods; and that which other men regard as an object of diſgrace, appears in my judgment to be the very thing by which this republic is chiefly ſuſtained. I mean ſuperſtition; which is impreſſed with all its terrors and influences both on the private actions of the citizens and the public adminiſtration of the ſtate, to a degree that can ſcarcely be exceeded.

" The ancients therefore acted not abſurdly, nor without good reaſon, when they inculcated the notions concerning the Gods, and the belief of infernal puniſhments; but much rather *are thoſe of the preſent age to be charged with raſhneſs and abſurdity* in endeavouring to extirpate theſe opinions; for, not to mention other effects that flow from ſuch an inſtitution, if, among the Greeks, for example, a ſingle talent only be intruſted to thoſe who have the management of any of the public money; though they give ten written ſureties, with as many ſeals, and twice as many witneſſes, they are unable to diſcharge the truſt repoſed in them with integrity. But the Romans on the other hand, who in the courſe of their magiſtracies, and in embaſſies diſburſe the greateſt ſums, are prevailed on by

there any other alternative left than the belief of Chriſtianity, or abſolute Atheiſm. In the revolutions of the human mind, exploded *opinions* are often

by the ſingle obligation of an oath, to perform their duty with inviolable honeſty. And, as in other ſtates, a man is rarely to be found whoſe hands are pure from public robbery; ſo amongſt the Romans, it is no leſs rare to diſcover one that is tainted with this crime." *Hampton's Polybius. Vol. 3. B. 6.*

Though the ſyſtem of Paganiſm is juſtly condemned by reaſon and Scripture, yet it aſſumed as true ſeveral principles of the firſt importance to the preſervation of public manners; ſuch as a perſuaſion of inviſible power, of the folly of incurring the divine vengeance for the attainment of any preſent advantage, and the divine approbation of virtue; ſo that, ſtrictly ſpeaking, it was the mixture of truth in it which gave it all its utility; which is well ſtated by the *great* and *judicious* HOOKER in treating on this ſubject. "Seeing therefore it doth thus appear," ſays that venerable Author, "that the ſafety of all ſtates dependeth upon religion; that religion unfeignedly loved perfecteth men's abilities unto all kinds of virtuous ſervices in the commonwealth; that men's deſire is in general, to hold no religion but the true, and that whatever good effects do grow out of their religion, who embrace inſtead of the true, a falſe, the roots thereof are certain ſparks of the light of truth intermingled with the darkneſs of error, becauſe no religion can wholly and only conſiſt of untruths, we have reaſon to think that all true virtues are to honour *true religion* as their parent, and all well ordered Common-weales to love her as their chiefeſt ſtay." *Eccles. Pol. B. 5.*

often revived, but an exploded ſuperſtition never recovers its credit. The pretenſion to divine Revelation is ſo auguſt and commanding, that when its falſehood is once diſcerned, it is covered with all the ignominy of detected impoſture; it falls from ſuch a height (to change the figure) that it is inevitably crumbled into atoms. Religions, whether falſe or true, are not the creatures of arbitrary inſtitution. After diſcrediting the principles of piety, ſhould our modern Free-thinkers find it neceſſary, in order to reſtrain the exceſſes of ferocity, to ſeek for a ſubſtitute in ſome popular ſuperſtition, it will prove a vain and impracticable attempt: they may recal the names, reſtore the altars, and revive the ceremonies, but to rekindle the ſpirit of Heathenism will exceed their power; unleſs it were poſſible to enact ignorance by law, or to repeal, by legiſlative authority, the light of ſcience and the dictates of reaſon.

2. The efforts of Infidels to diffuſe the principles of Infidelity among the common people, is another alarming ſymptom peculiar to the preſent time. *Hume*, *Bolingbroke* and *Gibbon* addreſſed themſelves ſolely to the more poliſhed claſſes of the community, and would have thought their refined

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ſpeculations debaſed and contaminated by an attempt to enliſt diſciples from among the populace. Infidelity has lately grown condeſcending: bred in the ſpeculations of a daring philoſophy, immured at firſt in the cloiſters of the learned, and afterwards nurſed in the lap of voluptuouſneſs and of courts; having at length reached its full maturity, it boldly ventures to challenge the ſuffrages of the people, ſolicits the acquaintance of peaſants and mechanics, and ſeeks to draw whole nations to its ſtandard.

It is not difficult to account for this new ſtate of things. While Infidelity was rare and confined to a few, it was employed as the inſtrument of literary vanity; its wide diffuſion having diſqualified it for anſwering that purpoſe, it is now adopted as the organ of political convulſion. Literary diſtinction is conferred by the approbation of a few; but the total ſubverſion and overthrow of ſociety demands the concurrence of millions.

3. The Infidels of the preſent day are the firſt Sophiſts who have preſumed to innovate in the very *ſubſtance* of morals. The diſputes on moral queſtions hitherto agitated amongſt Philoſophers have reſpected the *grounds* of duty, not the *nature*

of

of duty itſelf; or they have been merely metaphyſical, and related to the *hiſtory* of moral ſentiments in the mind, the ſources and principles from which they were moſt eaſily deduced; they never turned on the quality of thoſe diſpoſitions and actions which were to be denominated virtuous. In the firm perſuaſion that the love and fear of the ſupreme Being, the ſacred obſervation of promiſes and oaths, reverence to magiſtrates, obedience to parents, gratitude to benefactors, conjugal fidelity, and parental tenderneſs, were primary virtues; and the chief ſupport of every common-wealth, they were unanimous. The curſe denounced upon ſuch as remove ancient land-marks, upon thoſe who call good evil and evil good, put light for darkneſs and darkneſs for light, who employ their faculties to ſubvert the eternal diſtinctions of right and wrong, and thus to poiſon the ſtreams of virtue at their ſource, falls with accumulated weight on the advocates of modern Infidelity, and on them alone.

Permit me to cloſe this diſcourſe with a few ſerious reflections. There is much, it muſt be confeſſed in the apoſtacy of multitudes, and the rapid progreſs of Infidelity, to awaken our fears for the virtue of the riſing generation; but nothing

to ſhake our faith, nothing which Scripture itſelf does not give us room to expect. The features which compoſe the character of Apoſtates, their prophaneneſs, preſumption, lewdneſs, impatience of ſubordination, reſtleſs appetite for change, vain pretenſions to freedom and to emancipate the world, while themſelves are the ſlaves of luſt, the weapons with which they attack Chriſtianity and the ſnares they ſpread for the unwary, are depicted in the cleareſt colours by the pencil of prophecy. *Knowing this firſt*, ſays PETER, *that there ſhall come, in the laſt days, ſcoffers, walking after their own luſts**. In the ſame epiſtle he more fully deſcribes the perſons he alludes to; *as chiefly them which walk after the fleſh, in the luſt of uncleanneſs, and deſpiſe government; preſumptuous are they, ſelf willed, they are not afraid to ſpeak evil of dignities; ſporting themſelves in their own deceivings, having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot ceaſe from ſin; beguiling unſtable ſouls: For when they ſpeak great ſwelling words of vanity, they allure through the luſts of the fleſh, through much wantonneſs, thoſe that were clean eſcaped from them who live in error; while they promiſe them liberty, they themſelves are the ſervants of corruption*†. Of the ſame

* 2 Peter, iii. v. 3. † 2 Peter ii.

ſame characters JUDE admoniſhes us, *to remember that they were foretold as mockers, who ſhould be in the laſt time, who ſhould walk after their own ungodly luſts. Theſe be they*, he adds, *who ſeparate themſelves* (by apoſtacy) *ſenſual, not having the ſpirit.* Infidelity is an evil of ſhort duration. "*It has*," as a judicious writer obſerves, "*no individual ſubſiſtence given it in the ſyſtem of prophecy. It is not a* BEAST, *but a mere putrid excreſcence of the papal beaſt; an excreſcence which, though it may diffuſe death through every vein of the body on which it grew, yet ſhall die along with it.*" Its enormities will haſten its overthrow*. It is impoſſible that a ſyſtem, which by vilifying every virtue, and embracing the patronage of almoſt every vice and crime, wages war with all the order and civilization of the world; which, equal to the eſtabliſhment of nothing, is armed only with the energies of deſtruction, can long retain an aſcendency. It is in no ſhape formed for perpetuity. Sudden in its riſe, and impetuous in its progreſs, it reſembles a mountain torrent, which is

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* See an excellent work, lately publiſhed by the Rev. *A. Fuller*, entitled *The Goſpel its own Witneſs*. Sold by *Mr. Button*.

loud, filthy and deſolating; but, exciting a general alarm, and being fed by no perennial ſpring, is ſoon drained off and diſappears. By permitting to a certain extent the prevalence of Infidelity, Providence is preparing new triumphs for Religion. In aſſerting its authority, the Preachers of the Goſpel have hitherto found it neceſſary to weigh the proſpects of immortality againſt the intereſts of time, to ſtrip the world of its charms, to inſiſt on the deceitfulneſs of pleaſure, the unſatisfying nature of riches, the emptineſs of grandeur, and the nothingneſs of a mere worldly life. Topics of this nature will always have their uſe; but it is not by ſuch repreſentations alone, that the importance of religion is evinced. The prevalence of impiety has armed us with new weapons in its defence.

Religion being primarily intended to make men *wiſe unto ſalvation*, the ſupport it miniſters to ſocial order, the ſtability it confers on government and laws, is a *ſubordinate ſpecies* of advantage which we ſhould have continued to enjoy without reflecting on its cauſe, but for the developement of deiſtical principles and the experiment which has been made of their effects in a neighbouring country. It had been the conſtant boaſt of Infidels, that their

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ſyſtem, more liberal and generous than Chriſtianity, was ſo much better adapted to guide and enlighten the world, that it needed but to be tried to produce an immenſe acceſſion to human happineſs; and Chriſtian nations, careleſs and ſupine, retaining little of Religion but the profeſſion, and diſguſted with its reſtraints, lent a favourable ear to theſe pretenſions. God permitted the trial to be made: In one country, and that in the centre of Chriſtendom, the light of Revelation was ſuffered to undergo a total eclipſe, while Atheiſm performing on a darkened theatre its ſtrange and fearful tragedy, confounded the firſt elements of ſociety blended every age, rank and ſex, in indiſcriminate proſcription and maſſacre, and convulſed all Europe to its centre; that the imperiſhable memorial of theſe events may teach the laſt generations of mankind, to conſider Religion as the pillar of ſociety, the ſafeguard of nations, the parent of ſocial order, which alone has power to curb the fury of the paſſions and ſecure to every one his rights; to labourers and mechanics the reward of their induſtry, to the rich the enjoyment of their wealth, to nobles the preſervation of their honours, and to princes the ſtability of their thrones.

We might aſk the Patrons of Infidelity, what fury impels them to attempt the ſubverſion of Chriſtianity? Is it that they have diſcovered a better ſyſtem? To what virtues are their principles favourable, or is there one which Chriſtians have not carried to a higher perfection than any of whom their party can boaſt? Have they diſcovered a more excellent rule of life, or a better hope in death, than that which the Scriptures ſuggeſt? Above all, what are the pretenſions on which they reſt their claims to be the guides of mankind; or what is it which emboldens them to expect, we ſhould trample upon the experience of ages, and abandon a Religion, which has been atteſted by a train of miracles and prophecies, which millions of our forefathers have found a refuge in every trouble, and conſolation in the hour of death; a Religion which has been adorned with the higheſt ſanctity of piety and ſplendour of talents, which enrols amongſt its diſciples the names of BACON, NEWTON and LOCKE, the glory of their ſpecies, and to which theſe illuſtrious men were proud to dedicate the laſt and beſt fruits of their immortal genius?

If the queſtion at iſſue is to be decided by argument, nothing can be added to the triumph of Chriſti-

Chriſtianity; if by an appeal to authority, what have our adverſaries to oppoſe to theſe great names? Where are the Infidels of ſuch pure, uncontaminated morals, profound wiſdom, unſhaken probity, and extended benevolence, that we ſhould be in danger of being ſeduced into impiety by their example? Into what obſcure receſſes of miſery, into what dungeons have their Philanthropiſts penetrated, to lighten the fetters and relieve the ſorrows of the helpleſs captive? What barbarous tribes have their Apoſtles viſited, what diſtant climes have *they* explored, encompaſſed with cold, nakedneſs and want, to diffuſe principles of virtue and the bleſſings of civilization? Or will they rather chuſe to wave their pretenſions to this extraordinary, and in their eyes, eccentric ſpecies of benevolence (for Infidels, we know, are ſworn enemies to enthuſiaſm of every ſort) and reſt their character on their political exploits, on their efforts to reanimate the virtue of a ſinking ſtate, to reſtrain licentiouſneſs, to calm the tumult of popular fury, and by inculcating the ſpirit of juſtice, moderation, and pity for fallen greatneſs, to mitigate the inevitable horrors of revolution? Our adverſaries will at leaſt have the diſcretion, if not the modeſty, to recede from this teſt.

More than all, their infatuated eagerneſs, their parricidal zeal to extinguiſh a ſenſe of Deity, muſt excite aſtoniſhment and horror. Is the idea of an Almighty and perfect Ruler, unfriendly to any paſſion which is conſiſtent with innocence, or an obſtruction to any deſign which it is not ſhameful to avow? Eternal God! on what are thine enemies intent: what are thoſe enterpriſes of guilt and horror, that for the ſafety of their performers require to be enveloped in a darkneſs which the eye of Heaven muſt not pierce? Miſerable men! proud of being the offspring of chance; in love with univerſal diſorder; whoſe happineſs is involved in the belief of there being no witneſs to their deſigns, and who are at eaſe only becauſe they ſuppoſe themſelves inhabitants of a forſaken and fatherleſs world!

Having been led by the nature of the ſubject to conſider chiefly, the manner in which ſceptical impiety affects the welfare of ſtates, it is the more requiſite to warn you againſt that moſt fatal miſtake of regarding Religion as an engine of policy; and to recal to your recollection, that the concern we have in it, is much more as *individuals* than as *collective bodies*, and far leſs temporal than eternal.

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The happineſs it confers in the preſent life are bleſſings which it ſcatters by the way in its march to immortality. That future condition of being which it aſcertains, and for which its promiſes and truths are meant to prepare us, is the ultimate end of human ſocieties, the final ſcope and object of preſent exiſtence, in compariſon of which all the revolutions of nations and all the viciſſitudes of time, are light and tranſitory. *Godlineſs has*, it is true, *the promiſe of the life that now is*, but chiefly *of that which is to come.* Other acquiſitions may be requiſite to make men great; but, be aſſured, the Religion of Jeſus is alone ſufficient to make them good and happy. Powerful ſources of conſolation in ſorrow, unſhaken fortitude amidſt the changes and perturbations of the world, humility remote from meanneſs, and dignity unſtained by pride, contentment in every ſtation, paſſions pure and calm, with habitual ſerenity, the full enjoyment of life, undiſturbed by the dread of diſſolution, or the fear of an hereafter, are its invaluable gifts. To theſe enjoyments, however, you will neceſſarily continue ſtrangers, unleſs you reſign yourſelves wholly to its power; for the conſolations of Religion are reſerved to reward, to ſweeten and to ſtimulate obedience. Many, with-

out renouncing the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, without formally rejecting its diſtinguiſhing doctrines, live in ſuch an habitual violation of its laws, and contradiction to its ſpirit, that, conſcious they have more to fear than to hope from its truth, they are never able to contemplate it without terror. It haunts their imagination, inſtead of tranquillizing their hearts, and hangs with depreſſing weight on all their enjoyments and purſuits. Their religion, inſtead of comforting them under their troubles, is itſelf their greateſt trouble, from which they ſeek refuge in the diſſipation and vanity of the world, until the throbs and tumults of conſcience force them back upon Religion. Thus ſuſpended betwixt oppoſite powers, the ſport of contradictory influences, they are diſqualified for the happineſs of both worlds, and neither enjoy the pleaſures of ſin, nor the peace of piety. Is it ſurpriſing to find a mind thus bewildered in uncertainty, and diſſatisfied with itſelf, court deception, and embrace with eagerneſs every pretext to mutilate the claims and enervate the authority of Chriſtianity, forgetting that it is of the very eſſence of the religious principle to preſide and control, and that it is impoſſible to *ſerve God and Mammon?* It is this claſs of profeſſors,

feſſors, who are chiefly in danger of being entangled in the ſnares of infidelity.

The champions of Infidelity have much more reaſon to be aſhamed, than to boaſt of ſuch converts. For what can be a ſtronger preſumption of the falſehood of a ſyſtem, than that it is the opiate of a reſtleſs conſcience; that it prevails with minds of a certain deſcription, not becauſe they find it true, but becauſe they feel it neceſſary; and that in adopting it, they conſult leſs with their reaſon, than with their vices and their fears? It requires but little ſagacity to foreſee that ſpeculations which originate in guilt, muſt end in ruin. Infidels are not themſelves ſatisfied with the truth of their ſyſtem; for, had they any ſettled aſſurance of its principles, in conſequence of calm diſpaſſionate inveſtigation, they would never diſturb the quiet of the world by their attempts to proſelyte; but would lament their own infelicity, in not being able to perceive ſufficient evidence for the truth of a Religion, which furniſhes ſuch incentives to virtue, and inſpires ſuch exalted hopes. Having nothing to ſubſtitute in the place of Religion, it is abſurd to ſuppoſe that, in oppoſition to the collective voice of every country, age, and

time, proclaiming its neceſſity, ſolicitude for the welfare of mankind impels them to deſtroy it.

To very different motives muſt their conduct be imputed. More like conſpirators than philoſophers, in ſpite of the darkneſs with which they endeavour to ſurround themſelves, ſome rays of unwelcome conviction will penetrate, ſome ſecret apprehenſions that all is not right, will make themſelves felt, which they find nothing ſo effectual to quell as enliſting freſh diſciples, who, in exchange for new principles, impart confidence, and diminiſh fear. For the ſame reaſon, it is ſeldom they attack Chriſtianity by argument: their favourite weapons are ridicule, obſcenity and blaſphemy; as the moſt miſerable and wretched outcaſts of ſociety, are of all men found moſt to delight in vulgar merriment and ſenſeleſs riot.

Jesus Christ ſeems to *have his fan in his hand and to be thoroughly purging his floor*; and nominal Chriſtians will probably be ſcattered like chaff. But has *real* Chriſtianity any thing to fear? Have not the degenerate manners, and corrupt lives, of multitudes in the viſible Church, been, on the contrary, the principal occaſion of ſcandal and offence? Infidelity, without intending it, is gradu-

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ally removing this reproach, poſſeſſing the property of attracting to itſelf the morbid humours which pervade the Church, until the Chriſtian profeſſion on the one hand is reduced to a ſound and healthy ſtate, and Scepticiſm on the other, exhibits nothing but a maſs of putridity and diſeaſe.

In a view of the final iſſue of the conteſt, we ſhould find little cauſe to lament the aſtoniſhing prevalence of Infidelity, but for a ſolicitude for the riſing generation; to whom its principles are recommended by two motives, with young minds the moſt perſuaſive, the love of independence, and the love of pleaſure. With reſpect to the firſt, we would earneſtly entreat the young to remember, that by the unanimous conſent of all ages, modeſty, docility, and reverence to ſuperior years, and above all to parents, have been conſidered as their *appropriate virtues*, a guard aſſigned by the immutable laws of God and nature on the inexperience of youth; and with reſpect to the ſecond, that Chriſtianity prohibits no pleaſures that are innocent, lays no reſtraints that are capricious; but that the ſobriety and purity which it enjoins, by ſtrengthning the intellectual powers, and preſerving the faculties of mind and body in undiminiſhed vigour,

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lay *the ſureſt* foundation of preſent peace and future eminence. At ſuch a ſeaſon as this, it becomes an urgent duty on Parents, Guardians and Tutors, to watch, not only over the morals, but the principles of thoſe committed to their care; to make it appear that a concern for their eternal welfare is their chief concern, and to imbue them early with that knowledge of the evidences of Chriſtianity, and that profound reverence for the Scriptures, that with the bleſſing of God, (which with ſubmiſſion they may then expect) *may keep them from this hour of temptation that has come upon all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth.*

To an attentive obſerver of the ſigns of the times, it will appear one of the moſt extraordinary phænomena of this eventful criſis, that amidſt the ravages of Atheiſm and Infidelity, real Religion is evidently on the increaſe. *The Kingdom of God*, we know, *cometh not with obſervation*; but ſtill there are not wanting manifeſt tokens of its approach. The perſonal appearance of the Son of God was announced by the ſhaking of nations: his ſpiritual Kingdom, in all probability, will be eſtabliſhed in the midſt of ſimilar convulſions and diſorders. The blaſphemous impiety of the enemies of God,

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as well as the zealous efforts of his ſincere worſhippers, will doubtleſs be overruled to accompliſh the purpoſes of his unerring providence: while, in inflicting the chaſtiſements of offended Deity on corrupt communities and nations, Infidelity marks its progreſs by devaſtation and ruin, by the proſtration of Thrones and concuſſion of Kingdoms; thus appalling the inhabitants of the world, and compelling them to take refuge in the Church of God, the true ſanctuary; the ſtream of divine knowledge unobſerved is flowing in new channels, winding its courſe among humble vallies, refreſhing thirſty deſerts, and enriching, with far other and higher bleſſings than thoſe of commerce, the moſt diſtant climes and nations, until, agreeable to the prediction of prophecy the *knowledge of the Lord ſhall fill and cover the whole earth.*

Within the limits of this diſcourſe, it would be impracticable to exhibit the evidences of Chriſtianity, nor is it my deſign; but there is one conſideration reſulting immediately from my text, which is entitled to great weight with all who believe in the one living and true God, as the ſole object of worſhip. The Epheſians, in common with other Gentiles, are deſcribed in the text as being, previous

vious to their converſion, *without God in the world*; that is, without any juſt and ſolid acquaintance with his character, deſtitute of the knowledge of his will, the inſtitutes of his worſhip, and the hopes of his favour; to the truth of which repreſentation whoever poſſeſſes the ſlighteſt acquaintance with pagan antiquity, muſt aſſent; nor is it a fact leſs inconteſtible, that while human philoſophy was never able to aboliſh idolatry in a ſingle village, the promulgation of the Goſpel overthrew it in a great part (and that the moſt enlightened) of the world. If the unity and perfections of God, together with his moral government and excluſive right to the worſhip of mankind, are truths, they cannot reaſonably be denied to be truths of the firſt importance, and infinitely to outweigh the greateſt diſcoveries in ſcience; becauſe they muſt turn the hopes, fears and intereſts of man into a totally different channel from that in which they muſt otherwiſe flow. Wherever theſe principles are firſt admitted, there a new dominion is erected, and a new ſyſtem of laws eſtabliſhed.

But is it reaſonable to ſuppoſe, ſince all events are under divine direction, that the great Parent, after ſuffering his creatures to continue for ages

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ignorant of his true character, ſhould, at length, in the courſe of his providence, fix upon falſehood and that alone as the effectual method of making himſelf known; and that what the virtuous exerciſe of reaſon in the beſt and wiſeſt men was never permitted to accompliſh, he ſhould confer on fraud and deluſion the honour of effecting? It ill comports with the majeſty of truth, or the character of God to believe he has built the nobleſt ſuperſtructure on the weakeſt foundation, or reduced mankind to the miſerable alternative either of remaining deſtitute of the knowledge of himſelf, or of deriving it from the polluted ſource of impious impoſture. We therefore feel ourſelves juſtified, on this occaſion, in adopting the triumphant boaſt of the great Apoſtle, *Where is the wiſe, where is the ſcribe, where is the diſputer of this world? hath not God made fooliſh the wiſdom of this world? for after that in the wiſdom of God, the world by wiſdom knew not God, it pleaſed God by the fooliſhneſs of preaching to ſave them that believe.*

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